

25 May 1984

POPE/SHOOTING PALMER: Well, tonight, there is more evidence to support charges that Mehmet Ali Agca, the man who shot Pope John Paul, did not act alone. Marvin Kalb has been looking into this.

KALB: May 13, 1981, Pope John Paul II, shot twice in St. Peter's Square. Mehmet Ali Agca, a notorious Turkish gunman, was instantly seized, tried and convicted. Was he part of an international conspiracy, and if so, who ran him? NBC News has obtained a copy of the top secret report of the Italian state prosecutor, Antonio *Albanno, summarizing a 20-month-long investigation. Its major conclusion, that the Bulgarian secret services contracted with Agca for the organization and execution of the murder plan. But the Bulgarians, then as now, denied any involvement. After all, why would they want to kill this pope? The prosecutor's report provides answers and a wealth of backup detail. The pope is Polish, and his controversial role in the creation of Solidarity in August 1980 sent shudders through the communist empire of eastern Europe. A Polish crisis so dramatic, the report says, that eliminating the pope and labor leader Lech Walesa was considered necessary. It was at this time that Agca showed up in Sofia, the Bulgarian capitol, and met with *Todar Ivasov, an agent of the Bulgarian secret service. The report says they discussed an attempt on the pontiff's life in the spring of 1981. The report also says that Agca followed Lech Walesa very closely during his trip to the Vatican in January '81, but for reasons still unclear, the plot against Walesa fizzled out and died, but not the one against the pope. The report cites a number of planning sessions with Agca, the three Bulgarians--*Ivasof, *Jelu Vasilev, and *Sergei Antonov--and two other Turks, *Oro Chelek, who was seen in St. Peter's Square holding a gun, and *Becker Chelig, who got the Bulgarians to give Agca 3 million West German marks to do the job. Less than a year ago, Agca, in broken English, identified his accomplices. AGCA: ...Sergei Antonov was with me during (sic) attempt. UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER: Ivasof? Ivasof? AGCA: Yes, yes, yes. Ivasov and *Colyev.

KALB: Colyev was Vasilev's code name. He and Ivasov had fled to Bulgaria. A trial is now expected to start in Rome this fall. U.S. and Italian experts say the evidence cited in this report is very persuasive, but because the Italian judges do not have the actual Bulgarian order to assassinate the pope, there is a question about whether they can get a conviction. Marvin Kalb, NBC News, the State Department.

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IRAN/ARMS
SMUGGLING

PALMER: A former Justice Department official may have been caught in the government's crackdown on people illegally selling arms and other military hardware to Iran. NBC News has learned that the official could be among those indicted for helping to set up a parts pipeline. Jim Polk tonight on that investigation.

(GRAPHICS: The U.S. Capitol)

STANLEY POTTINGER: Mr. Chairman and members of the two committees, I am Stanley Pottinger.

POLK: Pottinger, testifying on Capitol Hill this week, was a assistant attorney general, this nation's top law enforcement official for civil rights in the Nixon and Ford years. But now Pottinger is under investigation, facing possible indictment for violating the arms embargo against Iran by helping send military supplies to the Ayatollah Khomeini's government during the hostage crisis. Authorities say this man, Cyrus *Oshami, was the Ayatollah's arms broker in New York. In the fall of 1980, the FBI put national security wiretaps in this building where Oshami operated out of a corner suite overlooking Central Park. The government says Pottinger, who was Oshami's lawyer, was heard on hidden microphones giving advice on how to make military shipments to Iran through dummy companies in other countries. Federal authorities say that military supplies disguised under phony invoices were flown to Zurich, Switzerland, then shipped to Tehran by this firm on a quiet street in Basel, the T & T Freighting Company, which the government says is Iran's arms merchant in Europe. Among the illegal shipments made in 1980 and '81 were sniper scopes, night vision lenses, radar equipment, and electronic guidance systems for Iran's air force. Pottinger went before a grand jury early this year, but he will not talk publicly about the investigation. POTTINGER: There's nothing to be discussed about it. There's an attorney working on it, and I have nothing to comment about.

POLK: Have you testified before the grand jury on that?

POTTINGER: I just can't comment about it, sorry.

POLK: I could ask you the tough question. As you may be aware, there's a recommendation working its way up to the Justice Department that you be indicted in the matter.

POTTINGER: I'm really, I'm sorry, I can't comment about it, Jim.

Continued

POLK: Federal officials say Pottinger approached the CIA during the hostage crisis to suggest Oshami could carry messages to the ayatollah. But they say when the CIA asked for an FBI wiretap to check up on Oshami, the tap picked up Pottinger advising Oshami on arms shipments. Cyrus Oshami is now operating out of London, beyond the reach of U.S. law, but his older brother was arrested in this case last week when he landed in New York and was caught in a U.S. customs sting operation. The grand jury is scheduled to meet within two weeks to return indictments in the arms smuggling case. Prosecutors here have asked the Justice Department here in Washington, to bring charges against Pottinger for conspiracy and perjury. James Polk, NBC News, New York.

PALMER: Tonight, Pottinger said if the charges are actually made, they will be the result of a sincere mistake by the FBI and the Justice Department.